



## **CEPPS/IFES Quarterly Report: April 1 – June 30, 2005**

### **Advancing Reforms in Philippine Election Administration and Management**

**USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement No. 492-A-00-04-00042-00**

**Under Leader Agreement DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project Period: October 2004 - December 2005**

**Total Budget: \$534,741      Expenses Recorded to Date: \$ 120,204**

## **RESULTS**

- A cost extension was approved by the Executive Project Council (EPC) for the Consortium for Election and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), increasing the program funding by \$215,000 and extending the implementation period through the end of 2005.
- The Election Technical Expert (ETE) met with the COMELEC Commission to agree upon program activities and to formalize COMELEC-IFES cooperation through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2005. (See Attached).
- At the request of COMELEC, an IT Specialist concluded an Information Technology review of COMELEC's election modernization program and long-term strategy. The review helped COMELEC evaluate strategies to implement its automation systems and to manage and conduct elections in conformity to international standards. Results were presented to the COMELEC commission during an en banc session in May 2005, while a comprehensive report is currently being reviewed and finalized.
- The ETE established contact with potential local training providers and identified two appropriate local partner organizations for developing targeted capacity building programs on planning for the COMELEC.
- A sub-grant agreement was finalized with the Consortium for Electoral Reform (CER), through which IFES is providing technical and financial assistance to support civil society participation in the ARMM elections.
- The ARMM Election Stakeholders Conference was held from June 13-14<sup>th</sup> in Cotabato City, where the Citizen's Coalition for ARMM Elections (CCAIE) was created.
- A regional level train-the-trainer session for the CER ARMM voter education module was held from June 15-16<sup>th</sup> in Cotabato City.
- A local program coordinator was hired to work with the nascent CCAIE and to provide assistance and oversight of the sub-grant administration activities in the ARMM.
- IFES initiated regular consultative meetings among COMELEC, CER, and PPCRV representatives in order to improve communication and provide a venue for sharing information and coordinating activities regarding voter education programs.
- The ETE obtained accreditation for and observed the special elections held in Cebu on May 30, 2005.

## **BACKGROUND**

Phase II of the CEPPS/IFES program “Advancing Reforms in Philippine Election Administration and Management” continued during the second quarter of 2005 with a focus on providing technical assistance to both COMELEC and CER to improve the conduct of the upcoming August 2005 elections in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

COMELEC is preparing to hold the ARMM elections on August 8. While there is still ongoing discussion about possible postponement, there may not be time for Congress to change the law in order to reschedule the election date by the time it reconvenes on July 25. No formal action has been taken by Congress to postpone the synchronized Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) polls, which are still scheduled for the last Monday of October 2005.

The ARMM elections will be implemented using a completely manual system for voting, counting, canvassing and transmission of results. This is due to the recent Supreme Court decision upholding an earlier ruling to disallow use of the Mega Pacific automated ballot counting equipment. Over one million voters will cast their ballots in more than 4,000 precincts across the five provinces to decide the races for governor, vice-governor and regional assemblymen. Counting will be held at counting centers to be identified by COMELEC; either at the polling place or in specially designated sites as required by the security situation. Upon completion of the first level of canvassing at the provincial capitals, the regional level canvassing will be held at the COMELEC headquarters offices in Manila.

The current political situation in the Philippines is volatile. The opposition is calling for the President’s resignation due to alleged fraud in the 2004 elections, which also implicates a COMELEC Commissioner and several ARMM electoral officials. Due to this ongoing crisis, there are growing calls to replace the Commissioners and selected election officials. However, Chairman Abalos continues to lead the Commission forward without any sign of giving in to its detractors. ARMM election officials are being supplemented with Regional Election Directors and other administrators from outside the ARMM in an attempt to add credibility and impartiality to the process. However, questionable ARMM election officials are maintaining their positions thus far despite the public’s lack of confidence. COMELEC is citing due process as the reason for not replacing officials who have been linked to the suspected improprieties. Some predict that Congress will move to replace the Commissioners when they reconvene at the end of July--just two weeks ahead of the poll date.

In the face of this uncertain environment, civil society continues to prepare itself to conduct voter education and domestic monitoring activities for the upcoming ARMM polls. IFES’ sub-grant to the Consortium on Electoral Reform was expanded in order to provide support to provincial and local level implementation of these important programs. The goal of this activity is to achieve a critical mass of advocates who will work toward the attainment of an honest, clean and credible ARMM election in the future. The ARMM-based NGOs engaged in these activities may also form the core for a new ARMM governance advocacy network in the post-election period.

## MAJOR ACTIVITIES THIS QUARTER

- **Program Component I: COMELEC**

### *Technical Assistance: IT Review*

An information technology specialist, Dr. Jorge Tirado, visited the Philippines from May 3-14 to conduct an IT review of COMELEC's automation systems. IFES met with COMELEC commissioners, IT personnel, and other senior staff to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the system and development process. Recommendations were developed on new features to be incorporated and follow-up actions to be taken. A brief presentation was also made to the COMELEC En Banc as well as to the US Embassy and USAID officials on the findings of the IT review and recommendations.

### *Scope and Methodology*

IFES' evaluation of the envisioned COMELEC Modernization Program was geared to test its ability to register voters accurately and efficiently, manage elector's information files and database, handle fingerprints voter identification, and implement electronic voting and accurate automatic ballot tabulation. The main concern was to determine the systems ability to comply with minimum electoral standards.

IFES also observed the Automated Vote Counting Machines System's accuracy and reliability, and investigated performance in cases where deliberate attempts to introduce errors into the vote tabulation process were made. IFES also investigated a number of common tabulation capabilities.

IFES' approach recognized that software is regularly changed, while hardware features in most systems are relatively static, especially if standard and off-the-shelf items are used. The assessment looked at all of a system's features working together at one point in time. It can be argued that evaluating hardware and system concepts is more important than the detailed performance of software, because substantial revision of software could be easily programmed to particular specifications as they occur. Software is the heart of any system; it binds hardware and firmware in a working process geared by logical programmed steps. Any change in software will be subjected to a harsh test in order to be certified and qualification testing will be a necessary process to identify any malfunction or equipment that lacks synchronization. This process could take longer than the time it takes to install a working computer. IFES' findings about the software's performance were contingent to how it was working together with other hardware components as one unified Automated Vote Counting unit.

IFES developed criteria that were general in nature, recognizing that there is no practical way to combine a wide range of qualitative and quantitative findings into a single assessment. This approach enabled IFES to focus on the primary criterion of the system's overall suitability for use in the Philippines' particular situation. The final report will underline the main problematic and possible conflicting issues and recommendations, which will serve as a guideline for a detailed project plan.

Specifications, standards, and assessment criteria for the COMELEC Modernization Program can differ significantly, depending upon one's perspective on the purpose that it is intended to serve. For example, for the results transmission, an Automated Vote Counting Machines System defines many aspects of what might be called an ideal COMELEC Modernization Program. However, this comprehensive system could have features and goals that are not fully consistent with the electoral needs of the Philippines. For example, this comprehensive system uses old technology intended primarily to apply to centralized vote counting in large metropolitan areas where polling places are concentrated in large polling centers and the transportation of the ballots is minimal and conducted under a controlled environment. Recent developments in voting systems meet the specific requirements of nations such as the Philippines in that they can respond to potential future advances in state of the art infrastructure which extend beyond the capabilities of actual facilities.

The outcome of the assessment is intended to be useful to the COMELEC election administrators who must choose among the diverse types and models of systems currently available or to continue with the current systems. The assessment therefore determines and describes, from the perspective of the election administrator, the strengths and weaknesses of the COMELEC Modernization Program, in the Voter Validation System (also known internationally as the Voter Registration System), Automated Vote Counting and Canvassing, and Electronic Transmission of Results processes, thereby identifying the most important aspects. This will enable the election administrators to determine if the system is best suited to the Philippines's particular situation.

While the IT review addressed several ways that COMELEC could still prepare in time for an automated ARMM election, the conclusions from the review also exposed the crucial need for implementing ongoing strategic planning and legal reform working groups as part of a more comprehensive and long-term approach to modernizing the election system. With the recent Supreme Court ruling upholding their earlier decision to ban the use of the automated counting machines, IFES will focus on longer-term recommendations affecting the 2007 and 2010 elections. This would possibly include the implementation of an electronic voting equipment fair during the last quarter of 2005.

#### ***Technical Assistance: Capacity Building***

The COMELEC planning department and senior staff require support in long-term and comprehensive strategic planning, project management cycles, and development and definition of the planning department's institutional role. COMELEC does not currently have a designated training department or an established third-party training program. The Omnibus election code has not been updated to reflect the change to an automated electoral system, although there is recognition among the senior staff that establishing an internal legal reform committee to address this issue is urgently needed.

IFES has a unique opportunity to build trust with the COMELEC Commission, senior staff, and rank and file members through the provision of capacity-building activities that have been identified by the CEPPS program as being critical to the modernization of this institution. IFES is currently meeting with other organizations to develop its current plans to become part

of a wider effort to address COMELEC's shortcomings within a comprehensive framework. In the meantime, IFES is pursuing the immediate implementation of the most critical capacity-building activities. The first training on planning is being designed and implemented in coordination with the Development Academy of the Philippines and targeted toward the COMELEC planning department. The second activity is under development with the University of the Philippines National College for Public Administration and Governance. This training will target key COMELEC senior staff members and address the missing link of strategic planning. IFES is working with UP-NCPAG to find ways to bring in corollary activities, such as the establishment of an Electoral Resource and Training Center, into this capacity building program. A project proposal is currently being finalized, with implementation targeted for the post-election period.

- **Program Component II: Civil Society**

- ***Sub-grant on ARMM Elections***

The sub-grant for the Consortium for Electoral Reform was approved, while additional activities were included in the cost extension to provide ongoing support for CER's activities in the ARMM elections, including domestic monitoring and voter education. CER aims to contribute to the free and fair conduct of the ARMM elections by providing trainers' trainings on voter education and establishing a regional network for implementing both voter education and domestic monitoring initiatives.

These objectives were met through the organization of the ARMM Electoral Stakeholders Conference, where local NGOs from the ARMM region were invited to participate in electoral activities. A plan of activities for voter education and election monitoring will be developed during the conference, thus giving ownership to the implementers of the activity.

- ***ARMM Electoral Stakeholders Conference***

The objective of the Conference was to gather various organizations and institutions in the ARMM to become stakeholders in contributing to the success of the regional election. It was expected to establish a local network in partnership with the CER to formulate plans and undertake activities of citizen-voter education and election monitoring in the ARMM election.

The ARMM Electoral Stakeholders Conference was successfully conducted on June 13-14, 2005 with 93 participants representing 64 organizations attending. These NGOs represented most of the major civil society organizations in the ARMM and are expected to provide the critical mass necessary for the implementation of the plan of activities.

Speakers from a variety of organizations contributed to the successful conduct of the conference, including the Bangsamoro Center on Law and Policy, Notre Dame University, PPCRV, Consortium for Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), COMELEC and PRRM. CER teamed up with 7 local organizations who acted in the capacity of co-conveners for the conference, with representatives coming from CBCS, TACDRUP, Assalam, COMMA, and Sindaw Kalilitad. Guests included COMELEC Chairman Benjamin Abalos, the Acting

Deputy Chief of Mission Scott Douglas Bellard and Gerry Porta of USAID. Media was also present, with the following outlets represented: PIA, DXMS, ABS-CBN and DXMY.

The Conference agreed on two major points. First, the participants agreed to undertake an electoral monitoring project covering all polling places and all towns in the 2004 ARMM elections. In addition, the same individuals voted to implement a continuing citizen-voter education in relation to the 2004 ARMM elections and beyond.

To this end, the conference delegates agreed to the establishment of the Citizen's Coalition on the ARMM Elections (CCAEC). This is a tactical alliance at the civil society level for the 2004 elections. However, the possibility has been opened for future agreements and initiatives on electoral reform and good governance initiatives.

#### *ARMM Regional Voters' Education Trainers Training*

The ARMM Regional Voters' Education Trainers Training was successfully conducted on June 15-16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The objective of the training session was to establish a pool of trainers and educators from various local ARMM organizations and institutions. Seventy participants, representing sixty-two organizations -- nearly the entire ARMM Electoral Stakeholders Conference -- extended their stay in order to attend this seminar, surpassing the initial target participation level of fifty participants. These organizations are currently initiating local plans and activities for voter education throughout the ARMM region.

The training consisted of two separate modules that were fused into the ARMM election module: the Basic Citizen-Voter Module and the Moro Sectoral Module. The CER Education Committee handled the preparation of the module. It undertook the preliminary review of the modules in the light of the situation related to the ARMM election. It also undertook a pilot education session to test the Moro Sectoral Module during the last week of May 2005. All of the conference attendees agreed to participate in the regional citizen-voter initiatives.

The Conference represents a breakthrough in the mobilization of ARMM civil society organizations for electoral intervention in the form of monitoring and citizen-voter education. It is a promising start for electoral reforms in the region. It remains to be seen, however, if this new consensus will become a permanent and effective intervention. The organizations are a varied lot, ranging from politically aligned organizations, sectoral organizations, NGOs, and non-partisan groups.

CER did note the influence of traditional politics in the conference was palpable. The agreement to monitor, in fact, was limited to election day monitoring and avoidance of canvassing in certain areas in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and Basilan due to fears of clan or political violence. There were also suspicions of partisanship from some of the participants and the presence of some political operators in the vicinity of the Conference. A deliberate and cautious approach needs to be undertaken to weed out partisans and protect the integrity of the electoral interventions by this nascent civil society network.

### ***New Initiatives***

The ETE is exploring the possibility of holding a vendor fair before the end of the year in order to showcase electronic voting equipment. The event would be open to Philippine electoral stakeholders, including COMELEC, Congressional leaders, political parties, civil society, the media and voters. It is possible that regional electoral officials would be invited to participate as well. The goal of such an event would be to expose the attendees to the latest possibilities in technical solutions to modernize their electoral system.

The ETE is also investigating the possibility of providing an elections systems specialist to work with the relevant Congressional committees as a technical resource person. The objective of this activity would be to inform the interested stakeholders in their discussions on Constitutional reform about the various electoral systems and their potential affect on the Philippine election process.

### **ANTICIPATED ACTIVITIES NEXT QUARTER**

- Voter education train-the-trainer sessions will be held in five provinces of the ARMM, with local level activities to be implemented at the community level during the two weeks leading up to the election.
- Domestic monitoring train-the-trainer sessions will be held in five provinces of the ARMM, with echo trainings to be led by municipal team leaders prior to election day.
- A joint IFES-COMELEC training session will take place on July 22<sup>nd</sup> for the embassy monitoring teams currently preparing to observe pre-election, election day and post-election activities in the ARMM.
- ARMM elections will take place on August 8<sup>th</sup>. The ETE plans to observe the polls, security situation permitting.
- The IT assessment report will be finalized and reviewed with the COMELEC IT department and other senior staff as appropriate. Strategic planning for modernization of the COMELEC electoral processes will continue.
- A post-election seminar to evaluation CCAE voter education and monitoring efforts in the ARMM will be held.
- The political situation will be closely monitored in view of identifying the appropriate timing to start up legal reform activities with COMELEC, CER, and Congress.
- Capacity building programs in COMELEC will begin after the August 8<sup>th</sup> elections with a basic training course for the Planning Department.
- Meetings will continue to be held with UNDP, UP-NCPAG, civil society and COMELEC to coordinate IFES' electoral reform efforts as part of the wider governance programming.

**Attachment**

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING  
BETWEEN  
THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS AND  
IFES, INC.**

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**STATEMENT OF COOPERATION**

The Republic of the Philippines Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and IFES, Inc., in continuation of the existing spirit of cooperation, goodwill, and friendship between them, and wishing to formalize their relationship in a joint effort to strengthen their affinities in support of their respective endeavors for elections and democracy, hereby agree to the following:

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. will exchange information for research and analysis purposes in the field of elections and democracy;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. will collaborate in the field of technical cooperation onsite IFES, Inc. advisors;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. will combine their experiences and expertise in fields which might include election administration, information technology, strategic planning, structural redesign of the electoral organization, voter education, civic education, legal electoral reform, and professional development of staff through onsite technical assistance;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. will join efforts to establish in the offices of the COMELEC a Resource Center on Elections. The Resource Center will have as one of its main objectives to provide Philippine election officials and citizens sample materials used in other countries in view of permanently modernizing and improving the election administration in the Philippines. The administration of the Resource Center shall be the responsibility of The Republic of the COMELEC;

The Resource Center will periodically receive from IFES, Inc. a list of new materials related to election administration. The election administration materials will consist of publications with copyright and materials of free publication;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. will exchange publications on electoral processes and related matters on topics of joint interest;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. agree that the aforementioned areas of cooperation are in no means limitative or exclusive shall further needs arise in the course of their efforts;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc., although willing to cooperate, remain independent institutions and no financial obligation on either part is created by this Memorandum of Understanding;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. agree that this Memorandum will enter into force on the date it is signed by both parties;

The COMELEC and IFES, Inc. agree that the Memorandum of Understanding shall terminate upon the satisfaction of IFES' contractual obligations with USAID, ending on 30 September 2005, pursuant to



the terms of the Memorandum, and that either party may terminate the agreement by mutual consent at any time and upon written notification to other party.

DONE in Manila, Philippines

**Signers:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Mr. Benjamin Abalos**  
Chairman  
The Republic of the Philippines Commission on Elections

Date

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**Mr. Richard W. Soudriette**  
President  
IFES, Inc.

Date

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